WHAT IS A MOOD-ALTERING DRUG?

Mood-altering drugs, or psychoactive drugs, change or affect the way people think, feel, or act. These drugs usually have physical effects as well, but it is their ability to work on the mind that sets them apart from other drugs. Alcohol, prescription drugs (e.g., Valium®, Tylenol 3®), over-the-counter drugs (e.g., Gravol®) and street drugs (e.g., cannabis, cocaine) are all mood-altering drugs. Interestingly, many problem gamblers report they reach a mood-altered state when gambling.

A problem exists when someone continues to drink alcohol, take drugs or gamble even when this behaviour causes trouble in their life.

WHAT IS SUBSTANCE/GAMBLING ABUSE

Most people use mood-altering drugs and occasionally gamble without experiencing any problems. A problem exists when someone continues to drink alcohol, take drugs or gamble even when this behaviour causes trouble in their life. These troubles may be in the areas of work or school, relationships with family or friends, their health, the law, or how they feel about themselves.

Problems with alcohol, other drugs or gambling usually develop gradually, over time. The more a person drinks, takes drugs or gambles, the greater their risk for developing a problem.

The following are signs of a problem:

- tolerance: it takes more of the substance to get the desired effect; bigger risks are taken when gambling
- problems in major areas of life (e.g., poor job performance, arguments with family, impaired driving charge, financial trouble, depression, health problems)
- more time spent drinking, taking drugs or gambling, resulting in either daily use or using in binges
- less control over time spent using or the amount used; less control over behaviour when drinking, using or gambling
- blackouts: not able to remember periods of time when drinking, using or gambling

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION/CHECKLIST

Identifying a problem is the first step in dealing with it. The following checklists can be used to help identify a problem:

Checklist—Alcohol/other drug use

- ❑ Your use of alcohol/drugs has increased.
- ❑ You drink/use to get through new situations or social occasions.
- ❑ You can't remember things you said or did while drinking/using.
- ❑ You cover up or lie about your alcohol/drug use.
- ❑ You have problems or miss time at work because of your alcohol/drug use.
- ❑ You have arguments with your spouse or other members of your family because of your alcohol/drug use.
- ❑ Your alcohol/drug use is causing financial problems.
- ❑ You have legal problems because of your alcohol/drug use.
- ❑ You have tried to cut down or stop but couldn't.
- ❑ You have broken promises to others because of your drinking/drug use.
- ❑ Someone has told you they are concerned about your drinking/drug use.

Checklist—gambling

- ❑ You are placing larger bets and/or betting more often.
- ❑ You have growing debt problems because of your gambling.
- ❑ You hope for the "big win" to solve your financial or other problems.
- ❑ You spend large amounts of time gambling, leaving little time for family, friends, or other interests.
- ❑ You have tried to cut back or stop gambling but haven't been able to.
- ❑ You lie or cover up your gambling.
- ❑ You have feelings of "highs and lows" and miss the thrill of gambling when you can't gamble.

If you answered "yes" to any of the statements in the above checklists, you may have an alcohol, drug or gambling problem.

HOW FAMILY MEMBERS ARE AFFECTED

When one member of a family has a problem with substance use or gambling, all members of the family are affected. All family members, including children, learn to adapt to meet the needs of the using person. Family members must often assume responsibilities of the using person to keep the family going, while that person becomes less and less involved with the family.

As the problem progresses, the spouse will often try many different strategies to cope, gradually withdrawing from their partner after repeated attempts to stop the drinking, drug-taking or gambling. The couple may show little affection for each other, communicate by arguing, and/or have difficulty resolving problems together.

Children often live in fear, real or imagined. They learn they can't rely on their parents and they often take on parental responsibilities, such as caring for their siblings or running the household. Some of these children will have problems in school, get into trouble with friends, or experience depression. Some of these children will grow up to have alcohol, drug, or gambling problems of their own. However, it is generally found that the negative effects of living with someone with an alcohol, drug or gambling problem can be turned around when that person goes into recovery.

WHAT A WORKPLACE CAN DO

The following steps can be taken at an organizational level to prevent substance use and gambling problems and to promote a healthy, safe work environment:

Develop and enforce clear policies around alcohol, other drug use and gambling on company time.

Provide education to employees to increase their understanding of addiction-related problems.

Provide training to supervisors so they can recognize a problem and have the skills to intervene appropriately.

Provide support to employees with a substance abuse/gambling problem.

Set and consistently enforce policies to address job performance problems.

ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT A CO-WORKER?

Working beside somebody day-to-day gives co-workers a unique opportunity to recognize a problem early and to intervene in a positive way. Covering up for a co-worker with an alcohol, drug or gambling problem only hides the problem temporarily and allows it to get worse. Also, your safety and the safety of other team members are at stake. If you are concerned about a co-worker's alcohol use, drug use or gambling you may get advice or direction from your occupational health representative, employee and family assistance program (EFAP) representative, or supervisor.

talk to your co-worker about what you are observing. Let him or her know what kind of services are available and encourage them to use those services.

take immediate action if you think someone is impaired at work. Report this to the appropriate person. Safety must come first.

contact AADAC for advice or to learn more about substance use or gambling problems.

ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT A FAMILY MEMBER?

No one can force a loved one to stop drinking, stop taking drugs or to give up gambling, but family members can make positive changes to make things better for themselves. Each family member can work on their own recovery. Talking to someone about the situation can be of great help. Family members can also stop covering up or making excuses for the drinking, drug taking or gambling. Helping to hide a substance abuse or gambling problem only makes it easier for that person to continue and the problem gets worse. If you are concerned about a family member's use of alcohol, drugs or gambling you may

- contact your workplace EFAP representative, if you have one, to find out what services are available to you and/or your family members.
- contact AADAC for information and counselling.
- contact Alanon, Alateen or Gamanon. These 12-step programs offer support to family members if there is an alcohol or gambling problem.

ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR OWN USE OF ALCOHOL, DRUGS OR GAMBLING?

Take an honest look at your use of alcohol, drugs or gambling and how this is affecting you physically, socially and emotionally. Talk to friends and family members about how they see your use. Talk to a counsellor to help you decide how serious your problem may be and what changes you want to make. If you are concerned about your use of alcohol, drugs or gambling you may

contact your workplace EFAP representative, if you have one, for assessment and referral for counselling.

contact AADAC for information, assessment, individual and group counselling, detoxification centres and intensive treatment programs.

contact a 12-step program such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous or Gamblers Anonymous.

Test your knowledge—answers

1. Drinking coffee will help somebody who is intoxicated sober up.

   FALSE: Drinking coffee or taking a cold shower does not change the amount of alcohol in your blood. Only time can sober you up. It takes an adult one to two hours for the liver to break down a standard drink.

2. There is a link between the kind of work a person does and the tendency to engage in at-risk drinking. (At-risk drinking can include high levels of drinking each day, repeated drinking to intoxication, drinking that causes physical or mental harm, or drinking that causes the person to become dependent.)

   TRUE: While the majority of Alberta workers who reported drinking did so without any problems, about 10% engaged in harmful or hazardous drinking. This at-risk drinking was highest among workers in the construction and wholesale/retail trade industries.

3. People cannot become dependent on marijuana.

   FALSE: Heavy, long-term use of marijuana can result in both physical and psychological dependence. When heavy users stop taking the drug, they often experience withdrawal symptoms, which include irritability, sweating, tremors, sleeping problems and loss of appetite.

4. If you wait two hours after your last drink before driving home, you can be sure you are not legally impaired.

   FALSE: It depends on how much you drank, not when you had your last drink. It takes time for your body to get rid of alcohol, so you can be legally impaired many hours after your last drink even though you may no longer be feeling the effects of the alcohol.

5. Only people who drink every day are alcoholics.

   FALSE: Some people dependent on alcohol drink every day. Others may be binge drinkers—that's when there are periods of steady drinking followed by periods of abstinence (non-drinking).

6. A sign of problem gambling is "chasing" losses (trying to win back money that has previously been lost).

   TRUE: Problem gamblers become desperate to cover their losses and become convinced that if they keep on betting they're bound to win big, sooner or later.

7. Because alcohol is a depressant, it will help you sleep better.

   FALSE: Alcohol is a depressant, and it may help you get to sleep by relaxing you. However, it interferes with restful sleep and you can wake up feeling edgy. This can get worse the more you rely on alcohol to get to sleep.

8. Positive drug test results indicate that a drug is present in the specimen (blood or urine).

   TRUE: However, they do not establish the level of impairment at the time the sample was taken and therefore, are a poor predictor of "fitness for work." The tests do not indicate how the drug was used and cannot distinguish between chronic and occasional use.

9. A woman who drinks alcohol during her pregnancy risks having a baby with fetal alcohol syndrome.

   TRUE: Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) is an alcohol-related birth defect. Children with FAS may have lower IQs, have physical abnormalities, be developmentally delayed, have attention deficit problems and/or be hyperactive. It is not known how much alcohol consumed during pregnancy will result in FAS.

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For more information

AADAC (Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission) offers a range of services to assist businesses in managing workplace substance use and gambling concerns. These services include

Information/Resources • Besides the *It's Our Business Information Series*, AADAC offers several resources for workplace leaders and employees.

The *It's Our Business* manual gives leaders in the workplace the information they need to build a healthy, well-functioning workplace team. This practical, well-organized binder offers clear information and insightful advice in an easy-to-follow format, based on a philosophy of fitness for work. Employers and managers are advised to remain focused on what is their business: the employee's ability to do his or her job.

To supplement the manual, AADAC offers three brochures to inform employees and enlist them as allies in creating a workplace that is free from the problems created by the abuse of alcohol, other drugs and gambling:

- *Is Drinking, Using Drugs or Gambling Affecting My Work?* helps employees to assess whether their work is being affected by their substance use or gambling and offers suggestions on finding further help.
- *Someone at Work Has a Problem* guides employees in intervening with a co-worker who may have an alcohol, other drug or gambling problem by outlining workplace indicators and tips for a successful intervention.
- *What You Need to Know About Fitness for Work* outlines the concept of fitness for work, and describes how substance use and gambling affect fitness for work, what an employee can do to be fit for work, and what one can do when others are not fit for work.

For more information on these and other resources from AADAC, call 310-0000/780-427-7319 (in Alberta) or 1-800-280-9616 or check the website at www.aadac.com

Employer Consultations • If you are concerned about an employee's substance use or gambling and would like to discuss strategies to intervene, contact the AADAC office nearest you.

Client Services • AADAC's network of services offers information sessions, assessment, individual and group counselling, and intensive treatment to any Albertan concerned about a substance use or gambling problem. Contact the nearest AADAC office for information.

Treatment Programs for Employees • The AADAC Business and Industry Clinic offers residential treatment programs specifically for the workplace. Located at the Northern Addictions Centre in Grande Prairie, the clinic offers a complete range of services to meet the needs of employees with substance abuse or gambling problems, as well as the needs of the referring party. Services include detoxification, a 30-day alcohol and drug program, a 50-day cocaine program, a family program and extensive follow-up programs. For more information, call 780-538-6316 or 1-800-419-1149.

Training for the Workplace • AADAC offers training to assist businesses in addressing substance abuse and gambling in the workplace. Training topics include understanding addiction, alcohol and drug policy development, and supervisory training on dealing with the troubled employee. Workshops can be custom designed and delivered at the worksite. For more information, contact your local AADAC area office.

AADAC
ALBERTA ALCOHOL AND
DRUG ABUSE COMMISSION

For more information, contact your local AADAC office,
call 1-866-33AADAC or visit our website at www.aadac.com

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